

Romania

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Freedom of the Press

Press freedom is protected by the constitution but weakened in practice by financial insecurity and overriding political and business interests. In addition, laws on the books could restrict speech that is deemed to insult state symbols or religion, or that promotes fascist or racist ideologies. After a lengthy period of legal ambiguity, defamation was effectively decriminalized by a 2010 Supreme Court ruling, but a Constitutional Court decision in April 2013 overturned that judgment, casting the issue into doubt once again. In December 2013 the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of Parliament, passed legislation that would amend the criminal code to decisively recriminalize defamation. However, President Traian Băsescu promised to veto the bill, which was adopted without public consultation, and the issue remained pending at year's end.

Journalists use Romania's freedom of information law with decreasing frequency as cash-strapped outlets' commitment to investigative journalism dwindles, and officials sometimes obstruct access to information on corruption or other sensitive topics.

Appointments to the National Audiovisual Council (CNA) are politicized, and its capacity is inadequate, resulting in biased decision-making and ineffective regulation. In January 2013, the CNA withdrew the broadcast license of the tabloid-style television station OTV due to years of unpaid fines for a variety of violations, including illegal political advertisements and incitement to racial hatred. OTV was owned by populist politician and businessman Dan Diaconescu, and its parent company had entered insolvency in early 2012. In October 2013, the government issued an ordinance that required the suspension of licenses for audiovisual media companies entering insolvency proceedings. Media freedom advocates expressed concerns about the measure, saying it circumvented the Broadcasting Law and the CNA. Critics also noted that the ordinance did not apply to other types of companies that require public licenses, and that the purpose of the insolvency process was to help businesses recover from their debts, which would be impossible without an operating license. However, later the same month, the Constitutional Court struck down the ordinance on procedural grounds.

The public television broadcaster, Televiziunea Română (TVR), continued to suffer from political contestation and growing debts in 2013. The station's leadership and board were obliged to resign in December after the parliament rejected its annual report, criticizing its deteriorating financial position and lack of political independence. However, disagreements within the ruling Social Liberal Union (USL) coalition prevented the appointment of a new general manager and board members, and a nominee backed by the National Liberal Party (PNL), the junior partner in the USL, was installed as interim manager. TVR continues to rely on the state budget for a significant portion of its funding, exposing it to political pressure from the parties in power.

The private media sector is dominated by powerful Romanian businessmen with political interests and holdings in other industries, and these interests typically determine an outlet's editorial line. In an apparent case of editorial pressure, the daily *Evenimentul Zilei* demoted journalist Daniel Conțescu as head of the sports section in January 2013 over an article that was critical of George (Gigi) Becali, a politician and owner of the soccer team Steaua București. Conțescu and his deputy then resigned in protest. Becali and the Steaua club had a history of hostility toward journalists. Reporters in Romania face verbal abuse, intimidation, and occasional physical aggression in the course of their work.

A large number of private broadcast and print outlets operate in Romania. However, the print sector has suffered severely since the economic downturn of late 2008, and the television industry is also facing contraction. Very few media firms are profitable. Some major media companies have been forced into insolvency after expanding rapidly with financial support from their owners, who treated them as tools of political or economic influence rather than self-sustaining journalistic enterprises, and who subsequently encountered legal and financial problems of their own. Romania's leading television stations include Pro TV, owned by the Bermuda-based Central European Media Enterprises (CME), and Antena 1, owned by the daughter of politician Dan Voiculescu. In September 2013, Voiculescu was sentenced to five years in prison on corruption charges, and prosecutors in October accused Antena's general manager, Sorin Alexandrescu, of attempting to blackmail the manager of a cable provider with which Antena was involved in a pricing dispute. The case was ongoing at year's end. Foreign media conglomerates maintain a presence in the country, though some have withdrawn due to the difficult economic environment. Individual journalists suffer from low pay and are susceptible to various forms of financial and editorial pressure from owners and advertisers. Delays in salary payments are not unusual, and journalists at the newspaper *România Liberă*, mounted a one-day strike over the issue in February 2013.

Close to 50 percent of the population used the internet in 2013. Access is widely available, with no reports of government interference. However, online news outlets often lack the revenue needed to conduct original reporting.

2014 Scores

Press Status

Partly Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

41

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

12

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

15

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

14